

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to
Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English
Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer
Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are
Needed**

January 2003

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DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20220

INSPECTOR GENERAL
for TAX
ADMINISTRATION

January 31, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMISSIONER, WAGE AND INVESTMENT DIVISION

Gordon C. Milbourn III

FROM: Gordon C. Milbourn III
Acting Deputy Inspector General for Audit

SUBJECT: Final Audit Report - Significant Progress Has Been Made to
Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers
in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are
Needed (Audit # 200240052)

This report presents the results of our review to determine if all Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TAC) have the over-the-phone-interpreter (OPI) service and the equipment needed to access the service to provide tax law assistance to non-English speaking (NES) taxpayers.

Executive Order 13166, dated August 11, 2000, required each federal agency to examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which limited English proficiency persons can meaningfully access those services without unduly burdening the mission of the agency. This report provides an assessment of the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) efforts to comply with the Executive Order in its TACs.

In summary, we commend the IRS for implementing an interpreter service in its TACs to communicate with NES taxpayers before the President signed the Executive Order. The IRS used the 1990 Census data to decide where to pilot the interpreter service. The IRS piloted the service in Fiscal Year (FY) 1999 in 13 cities from Honolulu, Hawaii, to New York, New York. The IRS expanded the service to other cities in FYs 2000 and 2001 as funding permitted.

In FY 2002, the IRS decided to expand the service to all TACs. The IRS successfully placed the interpreter service, known as the OPI service, in 404 (97 percent) of its

417¹ TACs in FY 2002. However, the overall management of the service needs improvement.

Thirteen (3 percent) of the 417 TACs did not have a client identification number, which is required to access the OPI service. The NES taxpayers who visited these TACs on occasion experienced a 1-hour wait time before they were served. In other instances, the taxpayers were told to return with an interpreter.

Seven of the 13 TACs used another TAC's client identification number to access the OPI service. According to IRS management, each TAC should have its own client identification number. The managers of these TACs were not aware that each TAC should have its own client identification number.

The manager for five of the remaining six TACs tried unsuccessfully to obtain the OPI service. The manager of the sixth TAC did not request OPI service because a bilingual employee worked at the TAC. Therefore, the interpreter service was not available to the taxpayers that visited these six sites.

Also, 202 of the TACs requested additional equipment to be used with the OPI service. The equipment requested included handsets, splitters (a device that allows two telephone handsets to be used with one telephone), and telephone lines. The individual requests were consolidated into a national request that would be used to purchase the equipment. However, the equipment for 13 of the 202 TACs was not shown on the national request.

Finally, the justifications for requesting the equipment for 12 (55 percent) of 22 TACs judgmentally selected for review were not sufficient. For example, 5 of the 12 generally requested enough equipment to access the OPI service from all the counters at the TAC. However, review of the vendor usage reports showed these TACs used the OPI service infrequently. Also, these TACs were not in the new TAC design model, which requires OPI equipment for each IRS employee's work area.

IRS management advised us that the TACs that were not in the new TAC design should have OPI equipment for every other counter (e.g., if a TAC has six counters, OPI equipment should be in three of them). However, this information was not provided to the TACs' managers before they requested the additional equipment.

Vendor reports for the OPI service showed other discrepancies:

- Eight TACs had client identification numbers on the vendor's reports but were not listed on IRS records as TACs that were in operation in FY 2002.
- Eight TACs had two client identification numbers and, in some cases, the TACs used both numbers.
- Six TACs had their own client identification numbers but were told to use other TACs' client identification numbers.

¹ The number of TACs (417) used in this report is different from the number of TACs (414) used in the bi-monthly reports for the TACs because of changes made by the IRS (i.e., closing TACs, opening new TACs, etc.).

- The vendor's addresses for 160 TACs did not match the addresses on IRS records.

IRS management established the goal that all TACs should have the OPI service in FY 2002. However, they did not establish effective guidelines to ensure this goal was achieved. As a result, the IRS cannot ensure that it can service all NES taxpayers who visit its TACs. Furthermore, the burden on taxpayers who visited these TACs increased due to experiencing increased wait time or having to return on another day.

We recommended that the Commissioner, Wage and Investment Division, take steps to ensure the OPI service is operating as intended. This should include periodic reviews to ensure that all TACs have a client identification number, periodic monitoring of vendor reports to ensure all TACs are using the service as intended, and periodic guidance to TAC managers on program expectations for the OPI service. Taking these actions will assist the IRS in meeting the challenge of providing top-quality customer service to all taxpayers.

Management's Response: The IRS agreed with the recommendations in the report and has planned or taken corrective actions. Specifically, each TAC has OPI service available, and detailed OPI procedures have been completed and are being reviewed by Field Assistance managers. Management's complete response to the draft report is included as Appendix VII.

Copies of this report are also being sent to the IRS managers who are affected by the report results. Please contact me at (202) 622-6510 if you have questions or Michael R. Phillips, Assistant Inspector General for Audit (Wage and Investment Income Programs), at (202) 927-0597.

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

Table of Contents

Background	Page 1
The Internal Revenue Service Made Significant Progress in Providing Interpreter Services at Most Taxpayer Assistance Centers.....	Page 2
Management of the Over-the-Phone Interpreter Service Needs Improvement.....	Page 4
<u>Recommendations 1 and 2:</u>	Page 8
Appendix I – Detailed Objective, Scope, and Methodology	Page 9
Appendix II – Major Contributors to This Report.....	Page 11
Appendix III – Report Distribution List	Page 12
Appendix IV – Outcome Measures	Page 13
Appendix V – Over-the-Phone Interpreter Service Usage by State and Non-English Languages.....	Page 14
Appendix VI – Estimated Cost of Equipment Requested by Taxpayer Assistance Centers.....	Page 20
Appendix VII – Management’s Response to the Draft Report	Page 21

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

Background

The Federal Government provides and funds an array of services that could be accessible to eligible persons who are not proficient in the English language. To improve accessibility to those services, the President signed Executive Order 13166 on August 11, 2000. The Executive Order requires each federal agency to examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which limited English proficiency persons can meaningfully access those services without unduly burdening the mission of the agency.

Prior to the signing of the Executive Order, the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) issued a Multilingual Policy Statement on October 18, 1999. The Policy Statement included, among other things, providing interpreter services in many different languages for customers at some of the walk-in offices, now called Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TAC). The Policy Statement also mentioned the IRS' plans to expand the interpreter service the following 2 years.

In response to the President's Executive Order, the IRS established a Multilingual Initiative that incorporated the provisions from the Policy Statement and the Executive Order. Field Assistance (FA), a function in the Wage and Investment (W&I) Division of the IRS with responsibility for the TACs, provided in its Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 operating procedures that its TACs would offer multilingual assistance. The primary vehicle for providing the assistance was bilingual employees and access to an over-the-phone interpreter (OPI) service in each TAC.

In FY 2002, the IRS renewed its contract with a vendor to provide interpreter services. This service includes interpreters from all over the country who speak approximately 140 different languages. IRS personnel in the TACs obtain access to the interpreters by using telephone equipment, calling an access number, and supplying the required identifying information (a client identification number). The telephone equipment used includes two handsets and a splitter (a device that permits two telephone handsets to be used with one telephone). The

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

two handsets allow a taxpayer and an IRS employee to speak to an interpreter using the same telephone.

When a non-English speaking (NES) taxpayer visits a TAC, he or she is shown an identification card that lists various languages. The taxpayer points to the language he or she speaks, and the IRS employee dials the appropriate access number for an interpreter. The interpreter translates the taxpayer's question for the IRS employee, who does research to get an answer for the taxpayer. The IRS employee gives the information to the interpreter who translates it for the taxpayer.

This review was conducted in the Atlanta, Georgia; Santa Maria, California; and Des Moines, Iowa, IRS FA offices between July and October 2002. The audit was conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*. Detailed information on our audit objective, scope, and methodology is presented in Appendix I. Major contributors to the report are listed in Appendix II.

The Internal Revenue Service Made Significant Progress in Providing Interpreter Services at Most Taxpayer Assistance Centers

We commend the IRS for implementing an interpreter service in its TACs to communicate with NES taxpayers before the President signed the Executive Order. The IRS used the 1990 Census data that included demographic maps, population surveys, and the most linguistically diverse cities in the United States to decide where to pilot the interpreter service. The IRS piloted the service in FY 1999 in 13 cities from Honolulu, Hawaii, to New York, New York. The IRS expanded the service to other cities in FYs 2000 and 2001 as funding permitted. In FY 2002, the IRS decided to expand the service to all 417¹ TACs.

The IRS successfully placed the OPI service in 404 (97 percent) of its 417 TACs in FY 2002. These 404 TACs had a client identification number which is required to access the OPI service. The remaining 13 TACs (3 percent) did not have a client identification number.

¹ The number of TACs (417) used in this report is different from the number of TACs (414) used in the bi-monthly reports for the TACs because of changes made by the IRS (i.e., closing TACs, opening new TACs, etc.).

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

From June 17, 1999, to June 30, 2002, 189 TACs in 44 states² and the District of Columbia used the OPI service and made approximately 14,000 calls totaling approximately 141,000 minutes. The calls were to 58 different languages and cost approximately \$259,000. The chart below lists the top 10 languages that taxpayers requested along with other details on the use of the service.

Top 10 Languages Used and Other Information on the OPI Service

Language	Number of Minutes	Number of Calls	Avg. Length of Calls (In Minutes)	Charges for Calls
Spanish	128,836	12,602	10	\$231,638
Mandarin	2,084	242	9	4,343
Korean	1,246	130	10	2,490
Vietnamese	1,196	105	11	2,460
Cantonese	929	100	9	2,085
Russian	768	79	10	1,562
Haitian Creole	587	54	11	1,124
Japanese	587	48	12	1,156
French	528	57	9	1,079
Arabic	447	39	12	895

Source: Vendor Report from June 17, 1999, to June 30, 2002.³

Additional details regarding the TACs' usage of the OPI service by state and languages are in Appendix V.

² TACs in the following states did not use the OPI service: Delaware, Iowa, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Wyoming. TACs in Iowa did not use the service because they did not have a client identification number. The TACs in the remaining five states did not use the service because they either had bilingual employees or taxpayers did not request the service.

³ We did not validate the accuracy or validity of the vendor's data.

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

**Management of the
Over-the-Phone Interpreter
Service Needs Improvement**

Although the IRS placed the OPI service in the majority of its TACs to offer assistance to NES taxpayers, the FY 2002 goal that each TAC have the OPI service was not accomplished. In addition, we identified other conditions about the OPI service that warrant management's attention.

All TACs did not have a client identification number assigned to them

Thirteen (3 percent) of the 417 TACs did not have a client identification number, which is required to access the OPI service. The client identification number is a unique six-digit number assigned to each TAC for billing purposes and for tracking the use of the service. Before an interpreter can be connected to a call from a TAC, the IRS employee must provide the TAC's client identification number.

Seven of the 13 TACs used another TAC's client identification number to access the OPI service. These seven TACs were located in New York, Texas, and Illinois. Five of the remaining six TACs that did not have a client identification number were located in Iowa. The remaining TAC was located in Texas.

The IRS' goal for FY 2002 was to have the OPI service available in all TACs. IRS management also advised us that each TAC should have its own client identification number and should not be sharing numbers.

The manager for five of the TACs that did not have a client identification number had tried unsuccessfully to get the service for the TACs. The manager of the remaining TAC did not obtain a client identification number because the TAC had a bilingual employee. Therefore, the service was not available to the taxpayers that visited these six sites.

The managers at the seven TACs that were sharing client identification numbers were not aware that each TAC should have its own client identification number. In three cases, upper level managers told the TAC managers to share client identification numbers.

FA headquarters personnel relied on the former OPI analyst to ensure that all TACs had their own client identification

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

number. The analyst did not conduct reviews or follow up to ensure that each TAC had a number.

Managers in the TACs that did not have the OPI service informed us that during the 2002 Filing Season,⁴ NES taxpayers on occasion experienced wait times of up to 1 hour because an IRS employee was not available to assist the taxpayers. In some cases, the taxpayers left because the wait was too long. In other cases, the NES taxpayers were told to come back and bring an interpreter with them.

Although the actual number of taxpayers who had these experiences is not known, these actions increased the burden on NES taxpayers as they attempted to comply with the tax laws. According to the 2000 Census data, the 6 TACs that did not have a client identification number were located in cities with a total NES population of approximately 61,000. The languages spoken by the NES population included the categories of Spanish and Asian and Pacific Island.⁵ Since the TACs in these cities did not have the OPI service, these NES taxpayers potentially did not have access to the IRS' interpreter services that were designed and implemented for them.

Sharing client identification numbers prevents IRS management from being able to effectively monitor the use of the service by each TAC. Monitoring the use of the service could assist IRS management in managing and distributing resources to the TACs.

All TACs did not have all the equipment needed to access the OPI service, and those that requested equipment might not need as much as they requested

Information obtained from the IRS showed 202 of the 417 TACs requested additional equipment to be used with the OPI service. The equipment requested included telephone lines, telephone sets, handsets, and splitters. The individual equipment needs were consolidated into a

⁴ In general, the IRS defines the filing season as the first half of each calendar year, when individuals file their tax returns.

⁵ According to the 2000 Census, Asian and Pacific Island included Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, Hawaiian, and Samoan.

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

national request for equipment. We estimated the cost of the additional equipment is approximately \$117,530. See Appendix VI for a breakdown of the estimated cost.

A comparison of the TACs' individual requests for equipment to the national request identified 13 TACs that were not listed on the national request. Only 189 TACs were shown on the national request. However, IRS management was not aware of this discrepancy because there were no reviews of the individual requests to ensure they were all included on the national request.

We selected a judgmental sample of 22 of the 202 TACs that requested equipment. The justifications submitted for additional equipment were not sufficient for 12 (55 percent) of the 22 TACs. Examples of the justifications submitted for some of the 12 TACs were as follows:

- Five TACs generally requested enough equipment to access the OPI service from all counters.⁶
- Two TACs requested equipment in case of an emergency or to have extra equipment.
- One TAC requested equipment to replace equipment that was lost.⁷

IRS management advised us that the TACs that do not have the new TAC design model should have OPI equipment for every other counter (work area). For example, if a TAC has six counters, OPI equipment should be in three of them. However, this information was not provided to the TACs before they requested the additional equipment.

IRS management advised us that they would issue guidelines to the TACs to re-evaluate their equipment requests. The IRS plans to purchase the equipment as listed

⁶ Our analysis of the vendor usage reports showed these TACs infrequently used the OPI service. These TACs are not in the new TAC design model. If they were, they would need OPI equipment for each work area because the new TAC design includes a private work area for each IRS employee.

⁷ IRS personnel informed us that the TAC had never used the equipment prior to it being lost.

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

in the national request; however, it will distribute the purchased equipment based on the revised equipment requests received from the TACs. Because of the IRS' actions, we are not making recommendations in this area.

Vendor reports identifying the TACs and accounting for their use of the OPI service showed discrepancies

Analysis of the vendor reports for the period June 17, 1999, through June 30, 2002, identified several discrepancies:

- Eight TACs shown on the vendor reports had client identification numbers but were not listed on IRS records as TACs that were in operation in FY 2002. One of the eight used the OPI service.
- Eight TACs had two client identification numbers assigned to them. Three of the eight used both client identification numbers.
- Six TACs had their own client identification numbers; however, their managers instructed the employees to use other TACs' client identification numbers. The six TACs were located in Nevada, Arizona, Illinois, and Washington.
- The addresses for 160 TACs on the vendor reports did not match the addresses on IRS records.

Internal control guidelines suggest periodic monitoring of goals, which includes comparison and assessment of program data, to ensure that findings from reviews are promptly corrected or resolved. However, IRS management advised us that very few, if any, reviews of the OPI service were conducted during FY 2002. As a result, the goal of having the OPI service in all TACs during FY 2002 was not achieved.

Without establishing effective guidelines to monitor the accomplishment of goals, the IRS cannot ensure that it can service NES taxpayers who visit its TACs. Taxpayers who are not proficient in the English language may encounter additional wait times because the OPI service and needed equipment is not available in all TACs.

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

Recommendations

We recommend that the Commissioner, W&I Division, take the following actions to assist the IRS in meeting the challenge of providing top-quality customer service to all taxpayers:

1. Establish guidelines to ensure the OPI service is available in all TACs and operating as intended. The guidelines should include required periodic reviews of vendor reports for accuracy, which would include comparing the existing TACs with vendor information to ensure all TACs have client identification numbers and are not using other TACs' identification numbers.

Management's Response: The Commissioner, W&I Division, stated that due to a misunderstanding, TAC offices that had bilingual employees did not require the OPI service. The misunderstanding was corrected by issuing verbal instructions to Area analysts to ensure TAC managers were aware of the requirement to provide multilingual assistance through an OPI service. Each TAC office has the OPI service available. Additional actions are underway to determine the need for more equipment.

2. Issue a guidance memorandum to all TAC managers and other appropriate officials to advise them of the OPI service expectations. The guidance should address items such as the purpose for each TAC having a unique client identification number.

Management's Response: The Commissioner, W&I Division, stated they have completed detailed OPI procedures, and FA managers are reviewing them. The procedures include instructions for TACs to use only their own client identification number when accessing the OPI service and other program expectations. The unique client identification number will allow IRS management to track costs and usage for each TAC office.

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

Appendix I

Detailed Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The overall objective of this review was to determine if all Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TAC) have the over-the-phone interpreter (OPI) service and the equipment needed to access the service to provide tax law assistance to non-English speaking (NES) taxpayers.

To achieve the objective, we performed the following tests:

- I. Determined what data Internal Revenue Service (IRS) management used to decide which TACs would receive the OPI service in Fiscal Years 1999 through 2001.
- II. Determined what languages were used the most and the cost charged for the OPI service from the beginning of the program through June 30, 2002. Also, determined the TACs' use of the OPI service by state and languages.
- III. Determined if all TACs had a client identification number to access the OPI service. Contacted the managers of six TACs that did not have client identification numbers to determine the following:
 - A. Why the TACs did not have client identification numbers and/or why they were sharing client identification numbers with other TACs.
 - B. If NES taxpayers experienced long wait times.
 - C. What equipment the TACs without client identification numbers needed to offer assistance to NES taxpayers.
 - D. If each TAC's equipment needs were listed on the national equipment request.
- IV. Determined the population of NES taxpayers for each TAC that did not have the OPI service.
- V. Determined if a judgmental sample of 22 of 202 TACs that requested equipment had sufficient justification for their requests. Used a judgmental sample to ensure the following were selected:
 - TACs that requested additional equipment but previously had little or no use of the OPI service.
 - TACs where equipment was requested but the TAC did not have a client identification number to access the OPI service.

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

- The two TACs where NES taxpayers had experienced problems receiving assistance with their tax law questions.¹

VI. Determined if the vendor had client identification numbers for TACs that were not on the IRS' records and if there were any TACs listed with more than one client identification number.

¹ *Final Management Advisory Report: Taxpayers Continue to Receive Incorrect Answers to Some Tax Law Questions* (Reference Number 2002-40-113, dated June 2002), and *Taxpayers That Visited Taxpayer Assistance Centers in July and August 2002 Received Incorrect Answers to Some Tax Law Questions* (Reference Number 2003-40-024, dated November 2002).

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

Appendix II

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**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

Appendix III

Report Distribution List

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Director, Customer Assistance, Relationships and Education W:CAR

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**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

Appendix IV

Outcome Measures

This appendix presents detailed information on the measurable impact that our recommended corrective actions will have on tax administration. These benefits will be incorporated into our Semiannual Report to the Congress.

Type and Value of Outcome Measure:

- Taxpayer Burden – Potential; 61,000 non-English speaking (NES) persons did not have access to the over-the-phone interpreter (OPI) service (see page 4).

Methodology Used to Measure the Reported Benefit:

We compared the Internal Revenue Service's list of Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TAC) operating in Fiscal Year 2002 to the vendor's list of TACs and identified six TACs that did not have client identification numbers. The client identification number is required to access the OPI service. Five TACs were located in Iowa and one TAC was located in Texas.

We used the 2000 Census data and identified 61,000 NES persons by languages for each of the cities where the six TACs were located. We used the totals for the Spanish, Asian and Pacific Island, Other-Indo European, and All Other Language categories to identify the NES population in these cities.

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

Appendix V

**Over-the-Phone Interpreter Service
Usage by State and Non-English Languages**

State ²	Population ³ No. of Mins. Used No. of Calls Made ⁶	Language Categories ¹			
		Asian and Pacific Island ⁴	Other Indo- European ⁵	All Other Languages (Includes Hungarian, Arabic and African)	Spanish
Alabama		22,122	43,812	6,820	89,729
					244
					18
Alaska		22,186	12,851	31,047	16,674
		18			150
		2			20
Arizona		62,204	102,004	137,634	927,395
		25	148	19	283
		1	7	2	35

¹We grouped the languages that the 189 TACs called according to the 2000 Census language categories.

² The following states did not use the OPI service: Delaware, Iowa, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Wyoming. TACs in Iowa did not use the service because they did not have a client identification number. TACs in the remaining states did not use the service because they either had bilingual employees or taxpayers did not request the service.

³The population is by languages for people who indicated in the 2000 Census that they spoke a language other than English at home. The Census used four language categories: Asian and Pacific Island, Other Indo-European, All other Languages, and Spanish.

⁴According to the 2000 Census, Asian and Pacific Island included Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, Hawaiian, and Samoan.

⁵ According to the 2000 Census, Other Indo-European included French, French Creole, Italian, Persian, German, Russian, and Hindi.

⁶ The source of the No. of Mins. Used and No. of Calls Made is a vendor report dated from June 17, 1999, to June 30, 2002.

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

State	Population	Language Categories			
	No. of Mins. Used	Asian and Pacific Island	Other Indo-European	All Other Languages (Includes Hungarian, Arabic and African)	Spanish
	No. of Calls Made				
Arkansas		15,238	22,695	3,357	82,465
		1			3
		1			1
California		2,709,179	1,335,332	251,740	8,105,505
		1,253	304	32	32,670
		113	27	6	2,941
Colorado		63,745	100,148	18,456	421,670
		128	43	18	6,555
		13	4	2	721
Connecticut		47,993	251,335	16,541	268,044
		30	48	11	105
		4	7	1	9
District of Columbia		8,974	23,721	8,261	49,461
					120
					8
Florida		164,516	755,214	77,606	2,476,528
		112	94		1,342
		8	13		97
Georgia		116,456	168,629	40,238	426,115
		260	29	17	4,094
		31	3	1	401
Hawaii		267,157	14,242	1,906	18,820
		301			
		17			
Idaho		8,105	19,460	4,073	80,241
		2			218
		1			30
Illinois		248,800	640,237	78,006	1,253,676
		70	346	48	4,686
		7	30	5	438

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

State	Population	Language Categories			
	No. of Mins. Used	Asian and Pacific Island	Other Indo-European	All Other Languages (Includes Hungarian, Arabic and African)	Spanish
	No. of Calls Made				
Indiana		36,707	126,530	13,269	185,576
		11	40	19	2,690
		2	8	2	255
Kansas		33,203	41,207	6,998	137,247
					84
					4
Kentucky		21,031	51,025	6,356	70,061
					64
					4
Louisiana		41,963	225,750	9,462	105,189
					30
					3
Maine		5,737	76,079	2,539	9,611
			14		
			1		
Maryland		135,899	198,932	57,054	230,829
		5	6		529
		1	1		50
Massachusetts		171,253	529,784	44,522	370,011
		100	195	72	739
		17	20	10	53
Michigan		104,467	303,122	127,104	246,688
		1	16	23	102
		1	6	2	14
Minnesota		103,520	110,644	43,758	132,066
		87	4	256	843
		4	1	12	71
Mississippi		13,558	23,700	7,749	50,515
		7	21		90
		1	2		3

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

State	Population	Language Categories			
	No. of Mins. Used	Asian and Pacific Island	Other Indo-European	All Other Languages (Includes Hungarian, Arabic and African)	Spanish
	No. of Calls Made				
Missouri		41,970	97,816	13,743	110,752
		22			92
		4			7
Montana		3,006	17,978	10,334	12,953
					9
					1
Nebraska		15,014	27,905	5,080	77,655
		13		8	677
		2		2	78
Nevada		68,523	47,183	12,319	299,947
		147	90	46	16,561
		11	8	3	1,797
New Jersey		275,832	659,248	98,869	967,741
		21	12	10	523
		3	3	2	40
New Mexico		11,517	22,032	97,734	485,681
			17		780
			1		102
New York		671,019	1,654,540	221,236	2,416,126
		1,543	1,088	259	12,175
		199	102	18	1,040
North Carolina		78,246	119,961	26,368	378,942
		37	79		919
		5	5		107
Ohio		84,658	296,816	53,872	213,147
		26	89	34	237
		3	5	4	21
Oklahoma		34,517	36,892	26,063	141,060
		54			148
		4			12

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

State	Population	Language Categories			
	No. of Mins. Used	Asian and Pacific Island	Other Indo-European	All Other Languages (Includes Hungarian, Arabic and African)	Spanish
	No. of Calls Made				
Oregon		75,279	82,828	12,948	217,614
		22	46	16	683
		3	4	2	68
Pennsylvania		143,955	428,122	43,653	356,754
		57	41	34	208
		3	4	2	20
South Carolina		25,534	55,116	5,749	110,030
		9	3		108
		1	1		10
South Dakota		3,053	19,510	12,960	10,052
					99
					10
Tennessee		39,701	68,879	14,005	133,931
		9	8	12	649
		1	1	1	54
Texas		374,330	358,019	83,222	5,195,182
		869	378	61	32,071
		80	48	8	3,339
Utah		37,805	49,865	15,335	150,244
		25	54	8	1,232
		5	2	1	147
Vermont		3,015	24,334	935	5,791
			8		
			1		
Virginia		170,136	195,846	52,935	316,274
		94		42	434
		7		1	39
Washington		242,836	176,722	29,838	321,490
		1,396	323	450	4,871
		120	36	33	441

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
but Improvements Are Needed**

State	Population	Language Categories			
	No. of Mins. Used	Asian and Pacific Island	Other Indo-European	All Other Languages (Includes Hungarian, Arabic and African)	Spanish
	No. of Calls Made				
West Virginia		6,038	19,491	2,714	17,652
		7			12
		1			2
Wisconsin		61,447	124,719	13,768	168,778
		9	18		707
		1	2		91

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
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Appendix VI

Estimated Cost¹ of Equipment Requested by Taxpayer Assistance Centers

- Telephone lines - 215 @ \$75 per line = \$ 16,125
- Handsets - 415 @ \$15 per handset = \$ 6,225
- Splitters - 346 @ \$5 per splitter = \$1,730
- Telephone sets - 63 @ \$50 per telephone set = \$ 3,150
- Dial tone service for 215 telephone lines @ \$35 per month for 12 months = \$ 90,300

Total Estimated Cost for the First Year = \$117,530

¹ These prices are from the Internal Revenue Service's telecommunications service.

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers,
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Appendix VII

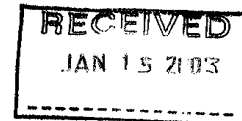
Management's Response to the Draft Report



COMMISSIONER
WAGE AND INVESTMENT DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
ATLANTA, GA 30308

January 13, 2003



MEMORANDUM FOR TREASURY INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR TAX
ADMINISTRATION

FROM:

John M. Dalrymple
John M. Dalrymple
Commissioner, Wage and Investment Division

SUBJECT:

Draft Audit Report – Significant Progress Has Been Made to
Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking
Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, But
Improvements Are Needed (Audit # 200240052)

I was pleased your report recognized our progress in providing interpreter service to non-English speaking (NES) taxpayers. We plan to continue to improve this important program. Taxpayer Assistance Centers (TAC) offer multilingual services to all NES customers. We provide multilingual service through bilingual employees and the over-the-phone interpreter (OPI) service. Effective October 1, 2002, we awarded the OPI contract to a new vendor, LLE Incorporated.

LLE Incorporated provides interpreter service for over 150 languages, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. This service meets all needs for interpreter service in TAC offices. We distributed a vendor provided User's Guide and a discussion paper introducing LLE Incorporated to all TACs when we began the new service. We also provided a list of all languages available for interpreter services in the link to LLE in the User's Guide.

I concur with your analysis that NES residents in cities where TACs did not have OPI services will benefit from full deployment of the OPI system.

Our comments and the corrective actions in process are attached.

If you have any questions, please call me at (202) 622-6860, or Jerry Heschel, Director, Field Assistance, at (404) 338-7141.

Attachment

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

Attachment

RECOMMENDATION 1

Establish guidelines to ensure the OPI service is available in all TACs and operating as intended. The guidelines should include required periodic reviews of vendor reports for accuracy, which would include comparing the existing TACs with vendor information to ensure all TACs have a client identification number and are not using other TACs' identification number.

ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE

Although we placed the OPI service in 404 (97 percent) of our 417 TACs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002, we did not accomplish our goal to provide service in each TAC. Managers in TACs that did not have the OPI service informed the TIGTA that during the 2002 filing season, NES taxpayers experienced wait times of up to one hour because an IRS employee was not available.

CORRECTIVE ACTION

The Field Assistance operating procedures require all TACs to provide multilingual assistance through an OPI service. This did not occur in all locations due to a misunderstanding that TAC offices that had bilingual employees did not require OPI. We corrected this by issuing verbal instructions to Area analysts to ensure TAC managers were aware of this requirement.

Effective for FY 2002, with the award of the OPI contract to LLE Incorporated, each TAC office has OPI service available. Additional actions are under way to determine the need for more equipment.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Completed October 2002

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

Director, Field Assistance, Wage and Investment Division

CORRECTIVE ACTION MONITORING PLAN

The vendor will provide data each month that we can download into an Excel spreadsheet and use in various reports. This data, automatically captured by the vendor, includes but is not limited to, the following information:

Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to Non-English Speaking Taxpayers in the Taxpayer Assistance Centers, but Improvements Are Needed

2

- Top 5 languages used, based on length of call and number of accesses
- Client ID number analysis and use history
- Length of calls reports/number of calls by language and by Client ID number
- Length of call/total cost by Client ID and nationality
- Number of languages used by Client ID number

Field Assistance Headquarters and Area Offices Management will analyze usage data monthly to determine if TACs are using OPI appropriately.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Issue a guidance memorandum to all TAC managers and other appropriate officials to advise them of the OPI program expectations. The guidance should address items such as the purpose for each TAC having a unique client identification number.

ASSESSMENT OF CAUSE

Sharing client identification numbers prevents Field Assistance management from effectively monitoring OPI use by each TAC. Monitoring the use of the service could assist us in managing and distributing resources to the TACs. Without establishing effective guidelines to monitor goals, we cannot ensure we serve NES taxpayers who visit TACs.

CORRECTIVE ACTION

We have completed detailed OPI procedures and Field Assistance managers are reviewing them. The procedures include instructions for TACs to use only their own client identification number when accessing the OPI service and other program expectations. The unique client identification number will allow us to track costs and usage for each TAC office. We will issue the procedures no later than 12/31/02.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

January 15, 2003

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

Director, Field Assistance, Wage and Investment Division

CORRECTIVE ACTION MONITORING PLAN

Following issuance of the new guidelines, we will request each TAC having a unique client identification number to certify the requirement to use their unique identification

**Significant Progress Has Been Made to Provide Interpreter Services to
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3

number. Field Assistance Headquarters Area Offices Management will use monthly data from the vendor to determine if TACs are using OPI services appropriately.